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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Gaza Operation

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that DM Ehud Barak is inclined to accept a French proposal for a 48-hour suspension of the IDF offensive against Hamas to allow Paris the opportunity to mediate a cease-fire. (Yediot and Israel Radio reported that Israel rejected the proposal.) PM Ehud Olmert is opposed to the move and appears to Qstay the course.

Israel Hayom reported that FM Tzipi Livni is faltering. At the same time the media reported on efforts by the Quartet to broker a cease-fire. Media reported that French President Nicolas Sarkozy and his FM Bernard Kouchner are expected to visit Israel on Monday on their way to Lebanon. Media also reported that Turkey, France, and the UN all urged Syrian President Bashar Assad to use his influence with Hamas chief Khaled Mashal to agree to a truce. HaQaretz reported that so far, Assad has refused, saying that Israel must first halt its operation in Gaza. HaQaretz also reported that Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan plans to visit Arab countries.

The media reported that last night Hamas fired two rockets at Beersheva. One of the Katyusha rockets struck a kindergarten, causing damage. Israel Radio reported that five Grad rockets landed in Beersheva this morning, one on a school. The media reported that yesterday the government approved the call-up of 2,500 further reservists.

The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that Egypt has offered to mediate a cease-fire with Hamas if Israel halts all military operations in Gaza. The media reported that yesterday Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak insisted that he would not open the Rafah crossing between Sinai and Gaza unless it was controlled the PA, and European monitors under a 2005 agreement were present.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Hamas accused the PA of planning to return to Gaza with the help of Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that some Israel diplomats have overstepped the government's statements on the aims of the operation. For instance, Ambassador to the UN Gabriela Shalev was quoted as saying on Monday that the aim of the operation was to completely destroy Hamas.

Akin to other media stories, HaQaretz quoted a resident of Gaza's Jabalya refugee camp as saying that there are calls in Fatah for Israel to take out the Hamas leadership.

Yediot reported that Qal-Qaida is adopting Hamas: The global Islamic organization is targeting Israeli embassies around the world.

The Jerusalem Post reported that candidates of Hatnua Hahadasha (The New Movement)-Meretz will begin a new campaign today calling for a cease-fire and opposing a ground incursion. Citing the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the daily also reported that four left-wing pro-Israel groups -- J Street, Americans for Peace Now, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, and the Israel Policy Forum -- all defended Israel's right to strike Hamas installations in Gaza, but said that such actions would be counterproductive and damage Israel's security in the long run. They also called for intervention by the U.S. and the international community to restore a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the High Court of Justice is expected to rule today on a petition against a recent government decision barring foreign correspondents from entering Gaza.

HaQaretz reported that Deputy Attorney General Shai Nitzan decided yesterday that a criminal investigation for incitement to racism will be opened against 29 rabbis who signed two advertisements urging people not to hire Arabs. Both advertisements were issued following terror attacks in Jerusalem carried out by East Jerusalem residents:

Leading media reported that Ben-ami Kadish, an 85-year-old former U.S. Army engineer, has admitted he passed classified documents to the Israelis in the 1970s and '80s, entering the plea yesterday in federal court in Manhattan. Kadish said he believes he was promised that the government will not seek imprisonment at his February sentencing. Kadish was accused of taking home classified documents dealing with nuclear weapons.

A poll commissioned by the Channel 2-TV-affiliated Mako web site found that if elections were held today, Likud would win 29 seats, as would the Livni-led Kadima party. In the previous poll, Likud won 28 seats as opposed to Kadima's 29. Ranking third in the current poll is the Labor Party, with 14 seats. In the previous

poll the Labor Party was projected to receive only 10 Knesset seats, exactly as many as Shas and the Arab parties. Yisrael Beiteinu also made gains in the current poll, rising to 13 seats, while Shas dropped to eight seats followed by Meretz with seven. The right wing parties, United Torah Judaism (UTJ) and Jewish Home, receive four seats each. The current poll also asked the respondents whom they thought would be able to deal better with Gaza: Benjamin Netanyahu, Tzipi Livni, or Ehud Barak. Among respondents 41% said that Netanyahu would deal best with Gaza, leaving Livni (19%) and Barak (18%) trailing far behind. Summary: Likud: 29; Kadima: 29; Labor Party: 14; Yisrael Beiteinu: 13; Shas: 8; Meretz: 7; Hadash: 5; UTJ: 4 Jewish Home: 3; Hatikva (right-wing list): 3; United Arab List: 3; Balad (Arab party): 2.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: Q Hamas can rack up its first victory, as several European countries are already talking about a Q humanitarian Q cease-fire, and Egypt has been fixed in the public eye as a collaborator with Israel.

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote on page one of Ha'aretz: Q During the two-day truce, the IDF will arm itself with a new target bank, fresh intelligence, refreshed troops and domestic and international understanding of the need for a ground operation.

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: Q If Hamas accepts those conditions, which incidentally appeared in the tahdiya agreement from six months ago as well, then the war is over. But Hamas hasn't Q agreed to accept them.

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: Q The great Arab nation that is now protesting wants Hamas.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: Q There should be no talk of a cease-fire until the declared goal of achieving long-term normality in the South has been attained.

Prominent liberal author Amos Oz wrote in Yediot Aharonot: Q Hamas is to blame for the deterioration in Gaza.... But this operation must be limited in its goals: Israel has no other goal but to obtain as soon as possible a complete and absolute cease-fire, which will ensure quiet and calm on our border.

Block Quotes:

I. "Hamas Enjoys a Diplomatic Victory"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/31): Q Hamas can rack up its first victory, as several European countries are already talking about a Q humanitarian Q cease-fire, and Egypt has been fixed in the public eye as a collaborator with Israel. This will make it hard for Egypt to act as a mediator between Hamas and Israel, and the war in Gaza will require international involvement and certainly active Syrian involvement to end the hostilities. In that way Gaza goes from being a local dispute between Israel and Hamas to the status of half a state with the same status as Israel, so hopes Hamas. Such a step could never have come off through regular diplomatic channels, where Hamas would have appealed to Egypt or some other mediator, but only by enlisting the masses in the region and by bypassing the Palestinian Authority, which is not functioning during this crisis.

II. "Timing his Political Entrance"

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote on page one of Ha'aretz (12/31): Q Defense minister Ehud Barak, whose performance during the first days of Operation Cast Lead increased his public support, spoiled his image yesterday with his very own words. His ambiguous

statements, from behind the transparent veil of an off-the-record conversation, once again lowered him from the rank of commander to that of politician.... At a meeting with his aides] he did not explain the connection between the stable, long-term cease-fire whose achievement -- and nothing else -- would justify ending the operation, and a limited cease-fire called solely to enable negotiations on the larger cease-fire. The opposition he aroused from his colleagues in the government and senior defense officials managed to put the weaknesses of the group that will decide the operation's future at the top of the agenda.... Barak is willing to serve Gaza a two-course meal -- first the humanitarian course, then a double portion. This will not be a French kiss, but an Israeli version of what the American army, hit by a paralyzing sandstorm on its way to Baghdad in March 2003, termed an operational halt before resuming its advance. During the two-day truce, the IDF will arm itself with a new target bank, fresh intelligence, refreshed troops and domestic and international understanding of the need for a ground operation.

III. "Waiting for the Rain to End"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/31): The only practical-feasible idea at present is the Egyptian-Turkish initiative.... Hamas needs a consensus for its decisions not only in Gaza but in Damascus as well. In that case, this might require sending messengers, and they might have to leave for Egypt to hear the Egyptian proposal. The bottom line is that that will require at least four or five days of a lull in fighting. That isn't going to happen simply because Hamas isn't going to stop firing missiles and Israel isn't going to stop seeking its leaders.... Israel has set Hamas five conditions from the first day for ending the warfare: 1. An end to all high trajectory fire by all organizations; 2. The establishment of a security corridor along the border in which Hamas will not be permitted to have military forces; 3. The cease-fire will have no time limit; 4. All the border crossings will remain under Israeli control (the agreement over the Rafah border crossing that was reached in 2005 will remain valid); 5. Everyone will take drastic measures to reduce the volume of smuggling. If Hamas accepts those conditions, which incidentally appeared in the tahdiya agreement from six months ago as well, then the war is over. But Hamas hasn't agreed to accept them.

IV. "Understanding of the Last Grain"

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/31): The great Arab nation that is now protesting wants Hamas. It again turns out that there is no peace process, no reconciliation, and no willingness to recognize our very existence, even if we flee to the last grain of sand.... It would be worthwhile if this time we do not refuse to internalize this.

V. Cease Terror, Not Cease-Fire

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/31): On day four of Operation Cast Lead, international demands notwithstanding, it is way too premature for Jerusalem to be entertaining thoughts of a cease-fire. It is Hamas that needs an exit strategy to extricate it from a devastating situation of its own making. They locked themselves into the old Arab mantra of no recognition, no negotiation and no peace. They refused to honor agreements the PLO signed with Israel. They oppose the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. And they've kept Gaza an impoverished basket-case.... Let us keep our eyes on the prize. The government has belatedly but rightly declared the imperative to change the security environment in the south and stop Hamas from attacking our population. No country -- not Germany, Britain, France, or Russia; not Turkey, Greece, Korea or the United States -- would tolerate missile attacks on its homeland. Neither can Israel. Hamas must not get what it most wants. Hamas wants Israel's home front to be demoralized, to feel under siege. It wants to stampede our government into sending ground forces into Gaza's camps and alleyways, to ensnare our fighters in ambushes it has spent long months setting.... There should be no talk of a cease-fire until the declared goal of achieving long-term normality in the South has been attained.

VI. Cease-Fire Now

Prominent liberal author Amos Oz wrote in Yediot Aharonot (12/31):
QA ground offensive on the Gaza Strip could lead to entanglement and sinking into the Gaza mire, compared to which the Lebanese mud is no more than a puddle.... Hamas is to blame for the deterioration in Gaza. And if not for its provocations and shelling, there would have been no need for the Israeli operation. But this operation must be limited in its goals: Israel has no other goal but to obtain as soon as possible a complete and absolute cease-fire, which will ensure quiet and calm on our border. Such a cease-fire will be reached in exchange for alleviating the siege and the closure on Gaza. The sooner Israel issues a call for a complete cease-fire on both sides of the border, with the support and mediation of Arab states that do not support Hamas, the better it will be for us. The operation in Gaza should end as soon as possible and without a ground invasion, along with the shelling of IsraelQs communities.

CUNNINGHAM